

6. NEST BUILDING BY THE COMMON HOUSE RAT, *RATTUS RATTUS RUFESCENS* (GRAY)

A number of rodents belonging to the subfamily Murinae construct burrows in the soil, for example *Rattus rattus rufescens* the House Rat, *Bandicota bengalensis* the Mole Rat, *Meriones* the Desert Gerbille, and *Tatera* the Indian Gerbille. A few are known to construct regular nests, e. g. *Golunda ellioti* the Indian Bush Rat and *Vandeleuria oleracea* the Longtailed Tree Mouse. Among the species of *Rattus*, Roonwal (personal communication) has observed the building of nest-burrows by *Rattus rattus bullocki*, a rat of semi-arboreal habits found in evergreen scrub and near cultivated fields in eastern India.

Recently, while on a collection trip, we came across an interesting case of true nest-building, so far not recorded, by the House Rat *Rattus rattus rufescens*. The locality was a suburb of Coimbatore in south India consisting mostly of sugarcane and corn fields. The nests were built in fences of thick growing cacti, eight to ten feet high, surrounding the fields. They were situated at a height of five to six feet from the ground and the intervals between two consecutive nests ranged from six to twenty feet. The nests were rather crude and were built of freshly cut leaves and twigs arranged in an interlacing fashion among the branches of the cacti. The nests were shaped like shallow bowls and resembled the ordinary bird nest. When a nest was disturbed, the animals behaved as if well adapted to an arboreal life, moving with great agility among the cacti along the length of the fence. Many of the nests contained young ones of these animals.

We thank the authorities of the British Museum of Natural History for identifying the specimen sent to them.

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY,
GOVERNMENT SCIENCE COLLEGE,
JABALPUR, M. P.,
July 19, 1965.

D. R. SHARMA
S. SIVARAM

[Blanford's FAUNA (MAMMALIA) at p. 408 says *re.* this species: 'This rat is found both on the ground and in trees, where it builds nests among the branches. In the Laccadive Islands and other places it inhabits the crown of coconut palms and is said never to descend to the ground . . .' —EDS.]